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SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA: REQUEST TO TAPE A PRIME-TIME
INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY POWELL

1. Post strongly supports the request of prominent Turkish national security strategist Faruk Demir and centrist daily "Aksam"'s Ankara bureau chief Nuray Basaran to tape an interview with Secretary Powell to feature as the inauguration, or one of the first broadcasts, of their new, prime-time TV interview/current affairs program. The program, "Nasil Yani?" (equivalent to "What do you mean?") is to debut mid- to late-April on the privately-owned national channel Show TV. Demir and Basaran propose to tape an interview in Washington on a date in April convenient for the Secretary.

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2. Show TV is part of the Cukurova Group, which also owns "Aksam" and has a significant stake in Turkcell, Turkey's leading mobile phone network. In the past, Show TV has had a populist cast. However, we are assured by Nuray Basaran -- confirmed by the CEO of Turkcell, which has agreed to sponsor the program -- that she will have complete editorial freedom to run the kind of sober, balanced current affairs program she and Demir envisage.

3. Post's reasons for supporting this request:

(1) This interview would give a strong kick-off to our public diplomacy in the run-up to President Bush's visit to Ankara and Istanbul in the context of the end-June NATO Summit in Istanbul.

(2) The interview would also be timely opportunity to underscore the Secretary's and USG's key efforts to reach a Cyprus settlement which meets the core needs of the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey.

(3) On a more topical note, in the wake of much of the Turkish media's misinterpretation of the Secretary's statements about Turkey's Muslim population and secular system in his March 31 ZDF interview, he would have an excellent opportunity to clarify American understanding of the unique combination of Turkey's overwhelmingly Muslim population and secular, democratic system.

(4) CEO of the Advanced Strategy Center (YSM) Faruk Demir, whom we sent on an individual International Visitor program in November 2003, has set an exemplary standard among the press, think tanks and academic circles for consistently dispassionate, balanced analyses of the GME initiative in particular and U.S. foreign policy in general. He was the most sought-after commentator on Turkish television in 2003, especially in the run-up to, and period succeeding, OIF. We have seen that his analyses have a keen audience across the board, from the Prime Ministry to the Turkish General Staff and other elements of the Turkish State. His questions for the interview with former President Demirel which Nuray Basaran published in "Aksam" March 27 demonstrate a mature, balanced approach to journalism. We are thus most confident that the questions he would submit to the Secretary would allow maximum scope for delivering a clear message.

(5) Nuray Basaran has an impeccable reputation. For this reason, aside from her demonstrated journalistic acumen, she has the best access among all Turkish journalists to both Erdogan and his Cabinet and, on the other side, the Turkish General Staff leadership. Highly unusual in a press world which is relentlessly suspicious of or hostile to the U.S., her columns on U.S. policy have invariably taken a balanced, constructive analytic stance.

4. Embassy Ankara points of contact: PAO Jim Moore (moorej@state.gov) and IO Joe Pennington (penningtonjs@state.gov).

